Essential Fish Habitat
Final Mitigation Alternatives
Based on February 3, 2002 Council Motion

Alternative 1: Status quo. No additional measures would be taken at this time to minimize the effects of fishing on EFH.

Alternative 2: Gulf Slope Bottom Trawl Closures: Prohibit the use of bottom trawls for rockfish in 11 designated areas of the GOA slope (200m-1000m), but allow vessels endorsed for trawl gear to fish for rockfish in these areas with fixed gear or pelagic trawl gear.

Alternative 3: Bottom Trawl Gear Prohibition for GOA Slope Rockfish on upper slope area (200-1,000m). Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for targeting GOA slope rockfish species on upper slope area (200-1000m), but allow vessels endorsed for trawl gear to fish for slope rockfish with fixed gear or pelagic trawl gear.

Alternative 4: Bottom Trawl Closures in All Management Areas: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear in designated areas of the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska. In the Bering Sea only, bottom trawl gear used in the remaining open areas would be required to have disks/bobbins on trawl sweeps and footropes.

> Bering Sea: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for all groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea except within a designated "open" area. The open area is designated based on historic bottom trawl effort. Within the open area, there would be a rotating closure to bottom trawl gear in 5 areas to the west, north and northwest of the Pribilof Islands. Closure areas would be designated in Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 as identified by the EFH Committee, with ten-year closed periods for 25% of each block. After ten years, the closed portion of each block would re-open and a different 25% of each block would close for ten years, and so on thereafter. After 40 years, all areas within each block will have been subjected to a ten-year closure. This assures that 20% of the habitat has matured to an 'unaffected by fishing' status, assuming a two-year recovery interval.
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> Aleutian Islands: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for all groundfish fisheries in designated areas of the Aleutian Islands. Closure areas would be designated in the areas of Stalemate Bank, Bowers Ridge, Seguam Foraging Area, and Semisopochnoi Island.
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> Gulf of Alaska: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for rockfish fisheries on 11 designated sites of the GOA slope (200m-1000m). Allow vessels endorsed for trawl gear to fish for rockfish in these areas with fixed gear or pelagic trawl gear.

Alternative 5: Expanded Bottom Trawl Closures in All Management Areas: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear in designated areas of the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska. In the Bering Sea only, bottom trawl gear used in the remaining open areas would be required to have disks/bobbins on trawl sweeps and footropes.

> Bering Sea: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for all groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea except within a designated "open" area. The open area is designated based on historic bottom trawl effort.

Within the open area, there would be a rotating closure to bottom trawl gear in 5 areas to the west, north and northwest of the Pribilof Islands. Closure areas would be designated in Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 as identified by the EFH Committee, with five-year closed periods for 33 1/3% of each block. After five years, the closed portion of each block would re-open and a different 33 1/3% of each block would close for five years, and so on thereafter. After 15 years, all areas within each block will have been subjected to a five-year closure. This assures that 20% of the habitat has matured to an 'unaffected by fishing' status, assuming a two-year recovery interval.

Aleutian Islands: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for all groundfish fisheries in designated areas of the Aleutian Islands. Closure areas would be designated in the areas of Stalemate Bank, Bowers Ridge, Seguam Foraging Area, Yunaska Island , and Semisopochnoi Island. These closure areas extend to the northern and southern boundaries of the AI management unit.

Suboption for Aleutian Islands: Oceana's Aleutian Seafloor Habitat Protection Alternative dated Dec. 6, 2002. Close areas to bottom trawling that have high coral and sponge bycatch rates and low target species CPUE and reduce TAC by amount that historically came from that those. No expansion of bottom trawl fisheries to new areas. Pelagic trawls may be used in the closed areas, but only in the off-bottom mode. Institute area-specific coral/ sponge bycatch limits that close specific areas if exceeded. If implemented it would include the following actions: Expand observer coverage to 100%, utilize the CADRES program, and require each vessel to have VMS.

Additionally the proposal requests a comprehensive plan for research and monitoring that would include: Seafloor mapping, benthic research, and habitat impacts of all bottom tending gears, annual habitat assessment reports, experimental fishing permits to identify additional open areas.

Gulf of Alaska: Prohibit the use of bottom trawl gear for all groundfish fisheries on 10 designated sites of the GOA slope (200m-1000m). Additionally, prohibit the use of bottom trawls for targeting GOA slope rockfish on the GOA slope (200-1000 meters), but allow vessels endorsed for trawl gear to fish for rockfish in these areas with fixed gear or pelagic trawl gear.

Alternative 6: Closures to All Bottom Tending Gear

Prohibit the use of all bottom tending gear (dredges, bottom trawls, pelagic trawls that contact the bottom, longlines, and pots) within approximately 20% of the fishable waters (i.e., 20% of the waters shallower than 1,000m) in each of the regions described below.

Gulf of Alaska: The Gulf of Alaska would be subdivided into 3 regions: Western (corresponding to regulatory area 610), Central (areas (620 and 630), and Eastern (areas 640 and 650).

Aleutian Islands: The Aleutian Islands would be subdivided into 4 regions: Western (corresponding to regulatory area 543), Central (area 542), Eastern (area 541), and two smaller Bering Sea regulatory areas adjacent tot he Aleutians (combination of areas 518 and 519).

Bering Sea: The Bering Sea would be subdivided into 3 regions south of St. Lawrence Island denoting each of the predominant substrate types (sand, sand/mud, and mud) and taking into consideration the varying depth distribution of each substrate.

The closed areas would be identified based on the presence of habitat such as high relief coral, sponges, and Boltenia, with emphasis on areas with notable benthic structure and / or high concentrations of benthic

invertebrates that provide shelter for managed species. The closed areas would include a mix of relatively undisturbed habitats and habitats that currently are fished. Within a given region, existing area closures could comprise all or a portion of the closed areas for this alternative.

DRAFT MOTION February 3, 2003 4:40pm

1. Alternatives 1 through 6 shall be included in the analysis.

2. The EIS package shall move forward with no new or modified alternatives added, with the exception of those changes listed below.

3. The following changes to Alternatives 4 and 5 for the Bering Sea shall be made to reflect the SSC comments on rotational closures:

Alternatives 4 and 5 for the Bering Sea would be modified as follows:

Bering Sea Alternative 4, starting in the third sentence:

"Closure areas would be designated in Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 as identified by the EFH Committee, with ten-year closed periods for 25% of each block. After ten years, the closed portion of each block would re-open and a different 25% of each block would close for ten years, and so on thereafter. After 40 years, all areas within each block will have been subjected to a ten-year closure. This assures that 20% of the habitat has matured to an 'unaffected by fishing' status, assuming a two-year recovery interval."

Bering Sea Alternative 5, starting in the third sentence:

"Closure areas would be designated in Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 as identified by the EFH Committee, with five-year closed periods for 33 1/3% of each block. After five years, the closed portion of each block would re-open and a different 33 1/3% of each block would close for five years, and so on thereafter. After 15 years, all areas within each block will have been subjected to a five-year closure. This assures that 20% of the habitat has matured to an 'unaffected by fishing' status, assuming a two-year recovery interval."

4. In Alternatives 4 and 5, the map of the open area should be corrected to reflect the Committee's intent that the open area at the southernmost boundary be extended to include Cod Alley.

5. In Alternatives 4 and 5, the language in the second sentence should be modified by adding at the beginning: "In the Bering Sea only, bottom trawl gear . . . "

6. In Alternative 5b, the sub-option for the Aleutians, add language clarifying that pelagic trawls may be used in the closed areas, but only in the off-bottom mode. Discuss in the analysis a method for identifying bottom contact acceptable to enforcement.

7. In Alternative 5b, Area Definition, open areas shall be modified by staff per suggestions from

USCG in the following manner: use Lat/Lon grid based on 3 minutes of latitude by 6 minutes of longitude. This will align with and subdivide existing ½ by 1 degree ADF&G statistical areas in the geo-reference system familiar to the fishing fleets, and is roughly equivalent to a 5 by 5 km block.

8. Under all alternatives, evaluate how VMS and/or a secure on-board tracking systems may or may not improve enforcement.

9. Each mitigation alternative shall include a research and monitoring component to help determine the efficacy of that alternative, should it be implemented, and to determine to the extent practical the effects of fishing on habitat. Each alternative shall contain specific language as to the intent and objectives of its research component, linked with the goals of the alternative. The final hypothesis driven research design shall be developed when the preferred alternative is selected, in a subsequent process that includes public and stakeholder input.

All alternatives should contain benthic mapping to improve future management and meet research goals.

In the proposed research components – attempt to have all research closure/open blocks square rather than irregular shapes.

The Council supports full funding of the essential fish habitat research described in 9 above.